

Second Sunday after Pentecost

June 6, 2010

"Notice!"

Saint Luke 7:11-17

"When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her..."

St. Luke 7:13

*[Begin the sermon in silence –walk around, look around.
Have a prolonged time of silence and noticing.]*

What is going on?

What do you think I'm doing?

What were you doing or thinking?

I was noticing. I noticed some smiles, some bewilderment, some wondering, some discomfort.

This summer's theme is Jesus' Journey and Ours.

Jesus' journey begins with noticing – particularly in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus notices what other people do not notice. Jesus notices a widow outside the gate. She is one of those invisible people in the first century. Now this widow has not only lost her husband, but now her son. By losing both male members of her family – she loses her identity.

The Widow at Nain is a small town resident, powerless, and without an advocate. Widows in the ancient world were marginalized and once they lost their male counterparts they lost their power. She was not only losing a son, but her very means to any sort of status.

Jesus notices her and then Luke says: 'the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her.' Three things we need to notice here. This is the first time that Luke refers to Jesus as '*Lord*.' The second is that he '*saw*' her. The third is he had '*compassion*' for her.

Notice the title '*Lord*.' What comes to our mind when we hear this reference to Jesus? Lord – does it call forth an image of power, of authority, of 'lording it over'? Do we imagine Jesus up in the sky on a throne?

But notice – Luke begs to differ from that image of Lord. His first reference to Jesus as '*Lord*' includes the reference to compassion.

For St. Luke – Lord and compassion go together – mercy and Lord go together. For St. Luke ‘Lord’ does not mean judge or moral keeper of the books – the image is not some greater being enthroned on high.

Luke’s portrayal of Jesus is not a ‘Lord’ with a mighty army prepared to overcome any enemy. No! This Lord teaches us to love our enemies. This Lord shows us the way of compassion. This Lord sees and notices those who are invisible to most everyone else!

First word: ‘Lord’ – we may have to adjust our vision of Lord.

The second word we notice is ‘saw’ – Jesus saw her. Jesus notices – he sees this widow. Others passing by the gate may have briefly noted – ‘Oh, there goes another widow...too bad!’ But Jesus sees her.

How many of you have viewed the movie *Avatar*. In it the Navie Native who falls in love with the main character at one point says in her native tongue: “I see you!” She sees him for who he really is - a person. Her language means deeply seeing into the person – an inner vision.

Jesus’ Journey is one in which he notices and sees people. Jesus sees the widow as a person – not merely an object of mercy – but a person in need of relationships and connections.

The three things we are noticing in the Gospel are: ‘Lord,’ ‘Sees,’ ‘Compassion.’

Compassion:

Notice the word compassion – the Greek is:

σπλαγχνίζομαι - pronounced: splanchnizomai (*splank-knee-so-my*)

Means: *to be moved as to one's bowels, hence to be moved with compassion, have compassion (for the bowels were thought to be the seat of love and pity)*

Jesus is deeply moved from the gut to reach out to this widow. Christ is compelled by a passion not to let this widow suffer. Jesus’ journey is one of compassion and mercy.

Notice that Christ's compassion and mercy is disruptive. Imagine you and me at Scandinavian Cemetery. We have just removed the coffin from the hearse.

It is the coffin of the son of a widow in our congregation. We are processing with the body toward the grave. A stranger we never knew comes up and stops us.

How rude! How disruptive and shocking!

Oftentimes we have made Jesus into a milk toast – Clark Kent – a mild mannered reporter for God's 'Daily Planet.' What we have here in Luke is a fiery prophet – just like Elijah – a disrupter and agitator. One who disrupts and agitates with the grace of God!

The Kingdom of God has come near in Jesus, the Prophet – who in the tradition of the prophets is bringing God's salvation.

In the Hebrew language the word for salvation is *yasha*, from which we have Joshua. *Yasha* has this meaning: "to be wide, or roomy - a broad and spacious place." *Yasha* communicates the idea of freedom. It is "liberation from confinement, constriction, and limitation." The word for salvation in the Greek language the word is *sozo* or *soteria*, means "cure, recovery, remedy."

We often think of salvation as our souls going up to have after we die. Some Christian traditions talk about being saved as if it were simply and individualized personal relationship to Jesus. "Do you trust in Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior?"

In my many years of study of the Scripture I have yet to come across such an expression from Jesus or any of the disciples. Christ is concerned about widening the door, extending God's compassion to the outsider.

Christ brought salvation – that means a wide, roomy, broad and spacious place – a place that extends to the marginalized – those beyond the pale of the chosen few.

Salvation in the Greek usage has more to do with "cure, remedy, recovery, wholeness and healing." In this miracle Jesus really does more than just bring a person back from the dead. He restores community and wholeness. He gives this widow a new life as well as raising her son.

His act echoes that of the prophets – namely Elijah – who also brought a widow's son back to life.

Notice the reaction of the people is not: "Wow! Look at that trick! This guy must be God's Son because he raised a person from the dead!"

No! The crowd's response is: "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has looked favorably on his people!" They are not 'Wowed' by the dead being raised, but rather delighted that the presence of God has come near in this prophet – Jesus.

So, what does this mean for you and me – after all this is 'Jesus' Journey and Ours'?

How does Jesus' Journey affect our journey?

Notice! It is time for God's people to notice – notice those who are invisible to the common eye. Notice the co-worker who is constantly put down. Notice remarks that reveal lack of concern for the immigrant or outsider.

The church is called not to condone prejudice – but to stand in solidarity with those outside. We are called to disrupt the world's way with the way of Christ.

God's way is one in which weeping is turned into laughing, the poor receive the Kingdom of God, one does good to enemies, and shows mercy to them.

God's purpose continues to be that of healing and saving without discrimination among peoples. Jesus sees, is moved to compassion, and acts – not allowing even death to stop him!

How does Jesus Journey affect our journey?

Jesus' Journey affects our journey by calling us to disrupt our ways that separate us from one another.

It is a call to walk the way that sees others as persons and empowered by the Spirit share the grace and love we have received in Christ Jesus.

Amen

